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CONTENTS

Sr. No.	TITLE & NAME OF THE AUTHOR (S)	Page No.
<u>1</u>	Threshold effects in the relationship between oil revenues and growth in oil exporting countries. Mohsen Mehrara and Seyed Mohammad Hossein Sadr	<u>1-19</u>
<u>2</u>	Management of E-Waste- Black to Green. Dr. D. Sudharani Ravindran, Hari Sundar. G. Ram and M. Sathish	<u>20-33</u>
<u>3</u>	Customer Retention In Nationalised Banks In Erode of Tamilnadu. Dr. S. M. Venkatachalam and Ms. R. Anuradha	<u>34-67</u>
<u>4</u>	The Use of Visual Cues and Metaphors in Advertising. Vikram Kapoor	<u>68-84</u>
<u>5</u>	Library Administration Vs Management. J. B. Parmar and A. B. Parmar	<u>85-98</u>
<u>6</u>	Crisis Management. Dr. (Mrs.) A. Kumudha and Mr. K. Prabakar	<u>99-110</u>
<u>7</u>	Organizational Competency Management: A Competence Performance Approach. Dr. A. Kumudha, K. Prabakar and Benny J. Godwin	<u>111-121</u>
<u>8</u>	Impact of Just-In-Time Production Towards Global Competitiveness Through Competency Management. Dr. A. Kumudha, Benny J. Godwin and K. Prabakar	<u>122-133</u>
<u>9</u>	Data Mining Issues and Key to Success. Deep Mala Sihint	<u>134-149</u>
<u>10</u>	Synthesis of MCM-41 via different routes. Ranajyoti Das and Bharat Modhera	<u>150-171</u>
<u>11</u>	Green Marketing – A Bridge Between Consumerism And Conservation. Richa Arora and Nitin R. Mahankale	<u>172-184</u>
<u>12</u>	An Empirical Study On The Effect of Payment Mechanism For Purchasing Intention – The Moderating Effect of Consumer Involvement in Selected Product Categories in Vadodara. CS. Ashutosh A. Sandhe, Dr. Amit R. Pandya and DR. Abhijeet Chatterjee	<u>185-213</u>
<u>13</u>	A New approach to Sensor less vector control of induction motors. G. Srinivas and Dr. S. Tarakalyani	<u>214-228</u>
<u>14</u>	Eyes Bamboozling the Mind: Use of Optical Illusion in Advertising. Vikram Kapoor	<u>229-247</u>
<u>15</u>	Perception Of Employees Towards Performance Appraisal In Insurance Sector. Rita Goyal	<u>248-276</u>
<u>16</u>	Process Improvement of an Organization Enhancing Better Quality System – Applying TQM. Bhupender Singh, O. P. Mishra and Surender Singh	<u>277-289</u>

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Title

**EYES BAMBOOZLING THE MIND: USE OF
OPTICAL ILLUSION IN ADVERTISING**

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ABSTRACT:

Most of the work done in the multitudinous phases of the subject optical illusion is fragmentary. This paper brings forth the importance of optical illusion in advertisements, and how advertisers use them to their advantage. The paper presents before us a model of optical illusion and how it is actually created. It also brings forth the various types of optical illusions. The paper gives ample examples of “errors of sense”, “errors of judgment” and “errors of intellect” while elucidating visual illusion. The paper is also significant as it would draw the attention of the readers to an area of utmost importance-use of optical illusions in advertisements.

Keywords: Muller-Lyer Illusion, Kanizsa Triangle, Gestalt psychology, Mirage, Stroboscopic effect.

INTRODUCTION ON ILLUSION:

Our perception gets largely altered with vicissitudes in our experiences. Perceptual learning refers to changes in perception that can be attributed to prior experience. These are caused due to changes in the brain that alter the way we process sensory information. There are increasing discrepancies between perceptions and conceptions with science’s advances, which makes it difficult to define ‘illusion’. Visual illusions can provide evidence of object knowledge and working rules for vision, but only the phenomena are explained and classified. A tentative classification can be presented in terms of appearances and kinds of causes (Gregory, 1997). For Hermann von Helmholtz, ambiguities are usually resolved, and non-verbal object properties inferred, from knowledge by unconscious inductive inference from what is signaled and from knowledge of the object world.

It is extraordinarily hard to give a satisfactory definition of ‘illusion’. It may be the departure from reality, or from truth, but how are these to be defined? (Gregory, 1997). Illusions are false perceptions in which length, position, motion, curvature or direction is consistently misjudged. Illusions are distorted perceptions of the stimuli that exist in reality unlike in hallucination where the perception takes place without any actual sensory stimuli. There are two very different kinds of illusion: those with a physical cause and cognitive illusions due to misapplication of

knowledge. Although they have extremely different causes, they can produce some surprisingly similar phenomena (such as distortions of length or curvature). So there are difficulties of classification that require experimental evidence (Gregory, 1997).

Illusions due to the disturbance of light, between the object and the eyes, are different from illusions due to disturbance of sensory signals of eye, though both might be classified as 'physical'. Extremely different from both of these are cognitive illusions, due to misapplied knowledge employed by the brain to interpret or read sensory signals. For cognitive illusions, it is useful to distinguish specific knowledge of, objects from general knowledge embodied as rules (Gregory, 1997)

Perceptual learning results in a number of illusions. Size and shape constancy, habitual eye movement, continuity, and perceptual habits combine in various ways to produce a number of illusions. Some of the common illusions are Muller-Lyer Illusion, Poggendorff Illusion, The Hermann grid, Ponzo Illusion, and Moon Illusion to name a few.

In Muller-Lyer Illusion, though the lengths of the two lines are the same we find the line enclosed by the feather-head to be longer than the one enclosed by arrow head. If two objects make images of the same size, then the more distant object must be definitely larger. This also elucidates Muller-Lyer Illusion. If the feather-headed line looks farther than the arrow-headed line, then it has to be longer than the latter.

The above explanation, of course, presumes that the viewer has years of experience with straight lines and sharp edges. Groups of people in South Africa, the Zulus, live in a 'rounded culture' and they rarely encounter straight lines in their everyday life. They live in huts that are shaped like rounded mounds, their toys are round and curved in shape, and there are no straight roads or rectangular buildings in their environment. Research on the Zulus report interesting findings. The Zulus hardly experience the Muller-Lyer Illusion that confirms that past experiences and perceptual habits determine how we view the world. However, this is not the only explanation behind Muller-Lyer Illusion. More than hundred papers have been written over past several years as possible explanations but we are yet to arrive at a unanimous justification. We shall go deep into this towards the latter part of this paper.

OPTICAL ILLUSION:

Discrepancy between visually perceived images and the objective reality leads to an optical illusion also referred to as a visual illusion. Science has proven the fact that only a part of the undivided whole that one perceives come through senses from the object. The residuum comes from within. Visual illusions are either taken advantage of or circumvented by artists, stage artists, architects, magicians, comoufluers and also by advertisers alike.

Depending on perspectives, optical illusion can be extremely amusing, salutary, deluding or even calamitous and cataclysmic. The artists employ them to carry the audience to a Utopian world or a land of creativity and imagination; the magicians have used them in their extravaganza; the camoufluers have capitalized on them to swindle in wars; and advertisers have used them to draft creative ads. The following is a model of Optical Illusion which has been created after a thorough reading of various papers and books:

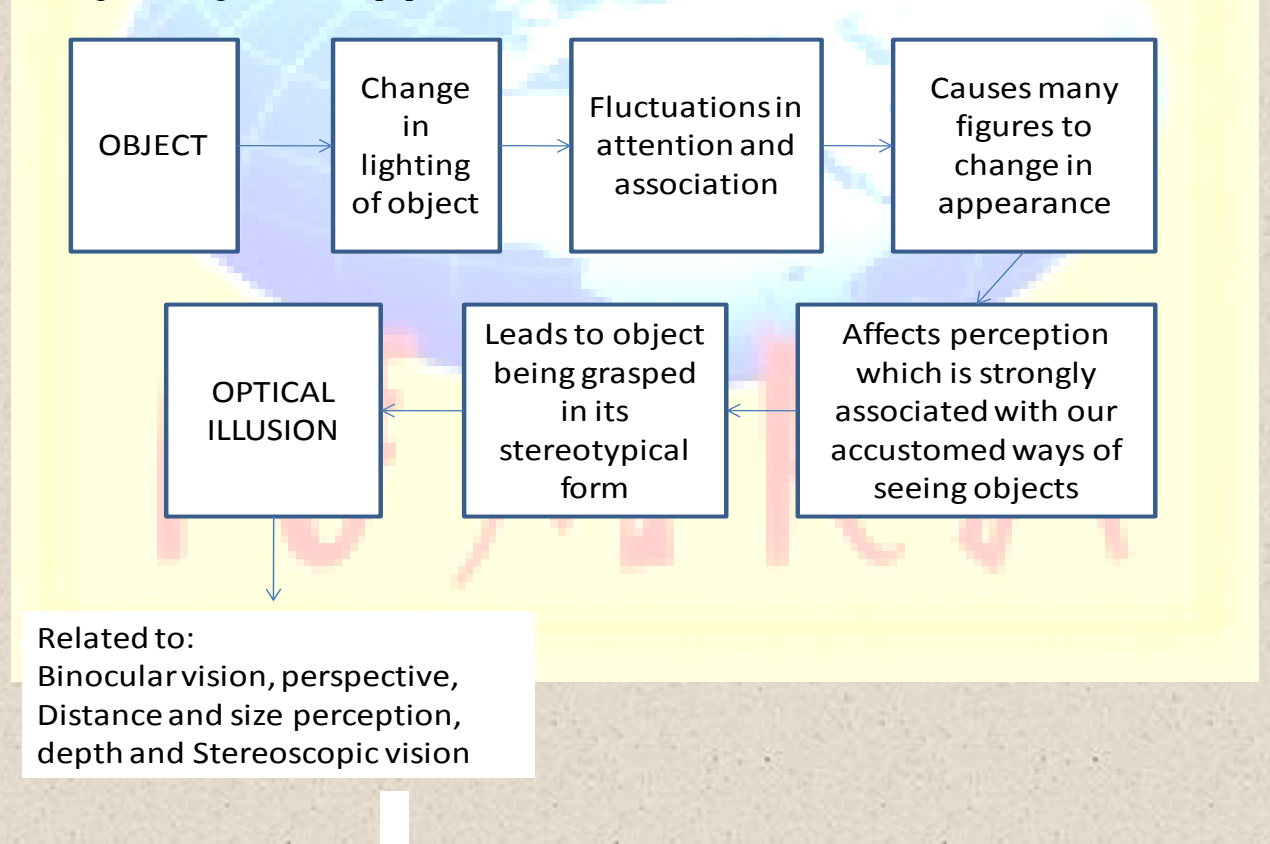


Fig.1: Model of Optical Illusion

Visual illusions are copious and variegated and they have long challenged the interest of the scientists. Of all the senses, one cannot gainsay that the sense of sight is quite discordant. Whatever we see with our eyes inside our head is projected outward. What occurs inside the eyes is little known to us, the reason why it makes it extremely perplexing to persuade ourselves that it is essentially a subjective sensation.

In 1922, Matthew Luckiesh wrote a book on Optical Illusion titled 'Visual Illusions: Their Causes, Characteristics and Applications'. During those years the world was engulfed in 'The Great War', and Matthew Luckiesh worked on ways to camouflage ships and airplanes using visual illusion. In World-war II boats were painted with stripes so that one couldn't tell which way they were moving. There was an illusionist who did a lot of tricks using mirrors etc to make the enemy think they were on target but they were 2 miles out.

Optical illusions are often unheralded and unexpected. Forms, lines, contrasts, colors, lighting, etc in art are so significant that it seems obvious that optical illusions are also equally important, if not more. Illusions are present since time immemorial in architecture long before painting was even developed. Such Greek architecture displays a highly developed knowledge of a myriad of geometric illusions.



Fig.2 Floor Tiles at Basilica

This is the picture of the floor tiles at the Basilica of St. John Lateran in Rome. The pattern creates an illusion of three-dimensional boxes.

Optical illusions play a significant role in our gratitude to the corporeal world. They may be put to work in various arts. Their far-flung existence and their momentum make visual perception the final adjudicator in decoration, painting, architecture, landscaping, and lighting. All these

elements are used in advertisements. Though optical illusion is called “errors of sense”, they are often “errors of intellect”. The senses may deliver correctly but error may emanate from imagination, inexperience, false assumptions and incorrect associations, and the frequency, recency, and vividness of the past experience.

It is necessary to understand how optical illusions work. The coherence between the material and the mental in vision is incomprehensible. Objects emit light and the eye focuses images of the objects upon the retina. Messages are then carried to the brain where certain molecular vibrations take place, and there appears consciousness, sensations, thoughts, desires and volitions.

Generally, we do not see things as they are or as they are related to one another. This leads us to the fact that the intellect does not correctly interpret the deliverances of the visual sense, although sometimes the optical mechanism of the eyes is directly responsible for optical illusion. There are a plethora of obscure influences that create optical illusions- past experiences, associations, desires, demands, imaginings, etc. Undubiously, there are various cases of errors of judgment. Here, it becomes pertinent to distinguish between error of judgment and error of sense. An over sighted estimate of the distance of a tower is due to an error of judgment, whereas the perception of a white paper as read on a green background is an error of sense.

TYPES OF VISUAL ILLUSION AND ADVERTISING:

Advertisers either over estimate or under estimate angles to create geometrical optical illusion. These are used mostly in print ads. Advertisers also create optical illusions of depth and distance by apparently modifying the ordinary criteria of relief and of distance. For instance, in a fog, objects are shown looming. The apparent amplification of the Sun or Moon near the horizon is also used commonly. Various other illusions are used by advertisers like alteration of ‘relief’ and ‘stress’ with lighting, and the flattening of the ‘vault’ of the sky. It has to be noted that assumptions relating to objects, if incorrect, could result in illusions. We all must have noticed how an increase in the luminosity of an object is accompanied by an apparent movement toward the observer, and conversely a decrease in luminosity produces an apparent movement in the opposite direction. Various involving illusions owe their existence to contrasts in brightness. When Black and White are juxtaposed, they mutually reinforce each other. Advertisers simply by vicissitudes in lighting of objects can produce an optical illusion. Optical illusions proliferate

ubiquitously. Movies are a multi-billion dollar industry right now. People go to a movie and become a part of a world created by actors, directors, and special effects. Yet, movies contain (and even are, in fact) optical illusions. What one sees are many different images flashing very rapidly before one. What one interprets is completely different - characters, a plot, emotion, three-dimensional images, and an elaborate setting. The figure below to the left was introduced by Gaetano Kanizsa, an Italian psychologist. Everyone sees a white triangle in front of the three black disks and inverted triangle. However, the white triangle actually does not exist. The contours of this triangle are illusory contours created by your brain. Note that the illusory triangle looks brighter than the background. This is a result of brightness contrast caused by the black disks being partially covered by the corners of the illusory triangle. We actually see the Kanizsa Triangle Optical Illusion often in everyday life.

The figure below is used by "The Limited" chain of stores in their windows. In the picture below to the right, we see a "Kanizsa Girl", we all see a girl where no girl actually drawn. This is aptly used in a plethora of advertisements, especially, in Fashion-related ads and comic ads.

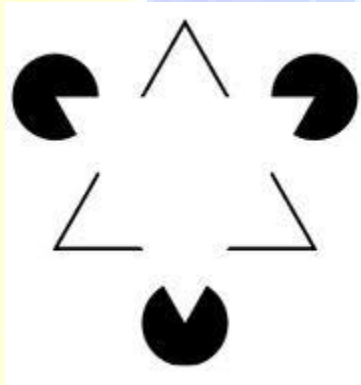


Fig.3 Kanizsa Triangle



Fig.4 Kanizsa Girl

Classification is important for natural sciences: it should be equally important for the unnatural sciences of 'illusions'. Classifying must be important for learning and perception, for it is impossible to make generalizations without at least implicit classes (Gregory, 1997). Von Helmholtz's unconscious inference for vision was inductive; for example inferring distances from perspectives and shapes from shading.

There are various types of Optical Illusion which can be seen below. This model is created from the literature mentioned in the book “Visual Illusions: Their Causes, Characteristics and Applications by Mr. Matthew Luckiesh.

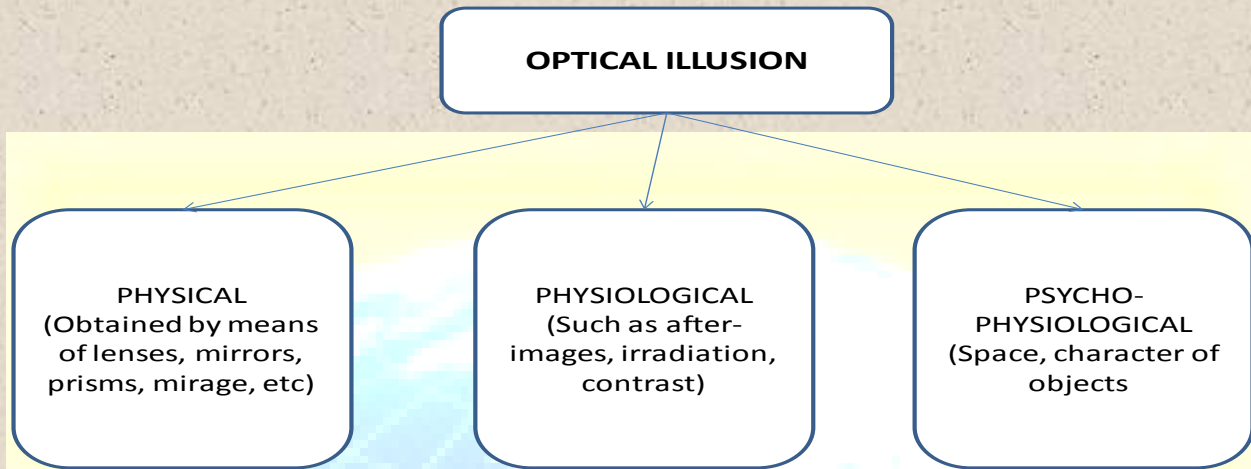


Fig.5 Types of Optical Illusion

Advertisers use optical illusions of a mirage in advertising, for say, a Mineral water advertisement. Mirage is one of the greatest illusions of nature. It would be misleading to say that a mirage is due to an error of sense or judgment. The eyes see what is presented but the inversions and other effects are due to variations in the refractive index of the atmosphere. In case of a mirage, rays of light coming from the object to the eye are bent from their usual straight-line course and the object appears to be where it is not.

We tend to perceive motion when the objects rapidly change their positions. This is called stroboscopic movement. This is typically seen in the strobe lights flashed on the dance floors. Each time the strobe flashes it shows the dancers in particular static positions. But when the light flashes rapidly then we witness normal motion. Many ad makers make use of this stroboscopic movement.

Let's take another example. While watching this picture one might want to check whether the flat screen is still flat. May be, it is actually rippling. Sony Bravia makes use of this rippling flat screen in its various ads, some of which are shown below.



Fig.6 Sony Bravia Uses a Rippling Flat Screen

We must have witnessed a head not attached to a body, hovering in a room, in various advertisements. This is the mirror magic optical illusion that is used by magicians as well. This illusion which is created mainly by the use of mirrors and the control of light has perhaps astounded viewers more than any other trick. Clearasil, a skin-care product uses optical illusion in its advertisements where its caption at the bottom says “As soon as black spots appear, use Clearasil.” This is shown below:

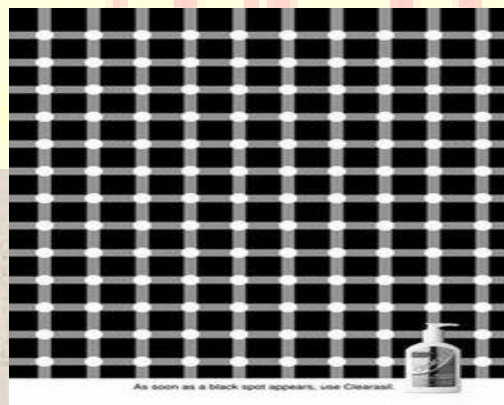


Fig.7 Clearasil ad using optical illusion

A ring or a circle of points is apparently very simple and might be taken to be direct sense perception, but it consists of a host of elemental directions to advertisers.

Similarly, colors may help mold form and give depth to flat surfaces; sometimes, they are 'advancing' and at other times 'retiring'. Whether the optical illusions are conveyed through fractals, photographs, architecture, art, or old fashioned pen and ink, they are bound to remind you that seeing is not believing. Veja is a Brazilian weekly newsmagazine published in São Paulo and distributed throughout the country by the media conglomerate Grupo Abril. The ad campaign for Veja Magazine not only combined words to make images but also won one Gold and two Silver medals in the 2004 Clio Awards. These were designed by the Ad agency AlmapBBDO, Sao Paul



Fig.8 Ads by Veja Magazine

The Germans have been brilliant when it comes to using optical illusions as they have incorporated it in the below-mentioned print advert. The sides of the trucks are painted in a manner that they reflect as if their sides are missing and giving glimpses of what it is carrying; Europeans see a world of straight lines & regular curves; Native Americans see far more irregular shapes such that they can easily be duped by something they're not used to. What strikes the mind is camouflage!



Fig.9 Use of Optical Illusion in a German ad

With designs to utilize impossible optical illusions, viewer's attention can be easily grabbed. People often love simple brain tricks and are more likely to linger on those advertisements that provide intriguing illusions for them to ponder.

In various ads, we see illusions of the Looking-glass where one sees oneself double: through the glass, as a kind of ghost; yet one knows one is in front of it. So, perception and conception separate. This may be the origin of notions of mind separate from body, i.e., dualism (Gregory, 1997). In case of Rotating spiral, the after effect of movement comes to play, where the spiral expands yet, paradoxically, does not change size. The adapted motion channel gives conflicting evidence with unadapted position signals. (Gregory, 1997). A size weight illusion is used in advertisements of Fevicol and Cement, where small objects feel heavier than larger objects of the same scale weight; muscles are set by knowledge based expectation that the larger will be heavier, which is generally, though not always true. Magritte mirror is often used in ads showing the man facing a mirror, but the back of his head appears in the glass. This looks impossible from our knowledge of mirrors (Gregory, 1997). Faces-in-the-fire, ink blots, galleons in the clouds, faces in the grass of a garden and on mountains, and so on, shows the dynamics of perception. Hypotheses are generated that go fancifully beyond the evidence.

Whereas the illusion trend is often more confounding to master than other possible design routes, the benefits make it one worth pursuing.

CONCLUSION:

Whenever there is a discrepancy in the consonance between visual perception and physical measurements, optical illusion arises. As such it is undeniable that no single theory can embody the colossal range of optical illusions as a myriad of factors are involved. It is imperative that organizing individual sensory stimuli as a meaningful whole is necessary to make sense of the world. Gestalt psychologists believe that one way of doing this is with the perception of these individual sensory stimuli as a meaningful whole. This can be used to elucidate various illusions including the Duck-Rabbit Illusion where the image as a whole switches back and forth from being a duck, then being a rabbit and why in the figure-ground illusion, the figure and the ground are reversible. The Kanizsa triangle is another example of application of the Gestalt principle. The Ponzo Illusion is an example of an illusion which uses monocular cues of depth perception to fool the eye. Similar to depth perception, motor perception is responsible for a number of sensory illusions. Advertisement animation is based on the illusion that the brain perceives a series of slightly varied images produced in rapid succession as a moving picture. In many ads, we see when a character is riding a vehicle, stable surrounding objects may appear to move actually faster than the fast-moving vehicle. Complex visual judgments lead to more complex intellectual judgments. All these may seem to be primary and innate, and thus certain, but it has been shown that these visual judgments may be analyzed into simpler elements. Therefore, they are liable to error. Though there is colossal scientific literature pertaining to the varied phases of the subject, however, most of it is fragmentary and much of it is disputable. Some have made a few attempts at generalizing and grouping examples of typical phenomena to condense the complex fabric as a whole. By understanding the nature of human perception and by realizing the fact that illusions are as real as any other non-illusory perception, science is advancing by exploring the fields of immersive technology, virtual reality, etc. Advertising is another field where illusion is randomly used to catch the attention of the viewers intelligently which successfully conveys the underlying message. There is no established explanation for many illusions, but even a tentative classification may suggest where to look for answers amid many new experiments. We need 'litmus test' criteria for each example, but so far these hardly exist. There are, however, various experimental tests and selective losses of the visual agnosias which may help to reveal perceptual classes (Humphreys & Riddock 1987 a, b; Sacks 1985).

Some images seem to be impossibilities though they are possible; some seem to rotate, vibrate, bend, skew or change colors. And it's all one's eyes bamboozling the mind!

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